THE CHURCH AND THE COMING KING

REV. CANON F. J. HORSEFIELD D.D.

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BY

THE REV. CANON F. J. HORSEFIELD, D.D.

Author of "The Return of The King," "Parables of the Second Coming," etc., etc.)

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PREFACE

THAT there is in these days an ever-growing and deepening conviction that "the Coming of the Lord draweth nigh" cannot be gainsaid. There are evidences on all hands that Christians who differ widely upon details of ecclesiastical organization, and who are separated by denominational distinctions, are yet agreed upon the great and vital belief that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent, whilst even those who belong to no religious body and who would disclaim any interest in spiritual truth are yet conscious of the near approach of some tremendous upheaval, though entirely ignorant of the form it will assume.

For over eight years meetings have been held monthly, without a single break, in the Kingsway Hall, London, at which the subject of the Second Coming has been enforced. Members of varying schools of prophetical interpretation, and of different sections of the Christian Church, have met in a spirit of wonderful unanimity to consider the great outstanding and essential features of the truth for which the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement

stands, and which it seeks to promulgate. The interest in these meetings has steadily grown, as is shown by the constant increase in the numbers who attend. But in addition to these central gatherings numerous Conventions and meetings are now being held regularly on similar lines not only in our own land but in many other parts of the world. At all these attention is concentrated upon the main facts of Second Advent truth, to the exclusion of minor points upon which there would doubtless be considerable divergence of opinion.

On the other hand even Sir Conan Doyle believes that *something* strange and terrible is about to happen soon. On his return from a recent Spiritualist Congress in Paris he said to an interviewer, "I have made no plans for future work, as my 'guide' has warned me to hold myself in readiness for a great event of a catastrophic nature that is overtaking the world." He added that he had received from Lady Conan Doyle messages from "the other side" foretelling this great world-catastrophe. "I get all my spiritualistic messages from my wife," he said. "She receives them from my 'guide,' and passes them on to me. For the past three years I have been getting messages relating to this coming disaster, and each message indicates its nearer approach. Confirmation of these messages has reached me from over sixty mediums in various

parts of the world, who have received similar information."

The believer in the Inspired Word has no need for warnings from "guides" such as those to which Sir Conan Doyle refers. Men and women who have been taught by the Spirit of God have long known that the world is to be visited by "a great event of a catastrophic nature," for that is clearly revealed in the infallible Scriptures. But such "spirit warnings" as those Sir Conan Doyle claims to be receiving, and which he thus places on record, may yet serve to illustrate the widespread feeling of uncertainty as to the future of the world in which we live.

Yet it cannot be forgotten that many who are really followers of Jesus Christ are perplexed by conflicting interpretations of prophecy, and are therefore tempted to neglect the study of His Return, deeming it unprofitable to spend time upon a subject so full of difficulty and uncertainty. In this way they lose the strength, the courage, the joy, and the incentive to holiness of life and Christian service that are inspired by a hold upon "the blessed hope." The following pages are written in order that they may, by the blessing of God, lead those who are already looking for the Lord's Return to a firmer hope and a clearer vision. If this desire be realized, and if, in addition, any who have neglected the study of the

subject hitherto are induced to search the Word of God for themselves, and to accept the truth therein revealed, then shall all praise be given to Him for Whose Coming the Church is waiting with a glad and growing anticipation.

F. J. H.

BRISTOL, *January*, 1926.

CHAPTER I

The Second Coming of Christ

In any effort to set forth clearly what the Second Advent of Jesus Christ will mean to the Church of God it seems necessary that some attempt should be made first of all to define what is implied by the terms used.

To many, the expression, "The Second Coming," conveys only a vague thought of some awe-inspiring disaster that is to fall upon the world in the far distant future. To others, it speaks merely of some spiritual experience, past or present, having no reference to any personal or visible return of the Lord. Some there are, even in the Christian Church, who, owing to an entire misunderstanding as to its meaning, can only think of the Second Advent with a sense of dread, instead of as a "blessed hope," as St. Paul terms it (Titus ii. 13).

On the other hand, there is an ever-growing multitude who have learned to look forward to the event with eager expectation and joyous hope. To them it is, indeed, a sheet anchor. In the midst of all life's deepening shadows and increasing perplexities,

apostasy in the Church and anarchy in the world, the shining of this hope grows brighter and brighter. They hear the distant roaring of a coming storm; they see the gathering indications of an approaching mighty tempest that will assuredly burst shortly upon the world, bringing overwhelming devastation in its track. But in their inmost hearts they have the assurance, not merely of deliverance from the threatening hurricane, but of a rest and glory inconceivable awaiting them, for they know that the Lord will come for His own, and save them from the evil to come.

Not long ago, I had a dream that impressed me greatly. I thought that my wife and I stood upon the outskirts of a vast crowd of people gathered in a huge amphitheatre. They had assembled to watch a series of athletic contests, but as these progressed an unexpected darkness fell, and became so intensified that the proceedings were stopped, and people, awe-struck, awaited developments. Suddenly upon the faces of many in that great crowd there broke a wondrous light that somehow seemed to deepen the darkness around them. I felt my wife's touch upon my arm; I saw that upon her countenance, too, there shone the mysterious radiance, and then, even as we looked and marvelled, we saw that we, and all those whose faces had been so strangely illuminated, were being lifted up from the earth by some gentle, yet

all-powerful influence. In that moment, from all parts of the amphitheatre, there rang out a thrilling, ecstatic and triumphant "Hallelujah: The *King* has come!" With this ringing in my ears, I awoke. This is, of course, but a very poor representation of what will really take place when the Lord shall come again. Still, it may serve to illustrate some of the features of that return.

(1) It is to be a return of the Lord *in Person*. This is the clear teaching of Holy Writ. His own promise implied it, for Jesus said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 3). The angels who appeared to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, at the time of His Ascension, definitely announced it, for they declared that "this same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i. 11). St. Paul taught it, for he writes, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

Now these, and many other passages that might be quoted, prove conclusively that the hope of the Second Coming can only be really fulfilled by an actual and personal return of the Lord. Whilst it is perfectly true that He comes here and now to take up His abode

in the heart of every believer; that He is continually coming by His Spirit into the lives of men; and that He is with His people "all the days," yet this by no means affects the truth that there will be a yet more literal accomplishment of the various predictions, and that just as surely as in the days of old His feet trod the hills and dales of Galilee, and even paced the waters of the sea, so again shall those same blessed feet stand upon the Mount of Olives. (Zech. xiv. 4). As certainly as once He was mocked and scourged in Jerusalem, and crucified outside the city walls, by the people whom He had come to seek and to save, so certainly will He be hailed there as Messiah and King, and will rule upon the throne of His father David (Luke i. 32). He came once in the utmost, deepest humiliation: He will come again in the glory of His Father and with His angels (Matt. xvi. 27). His first coming was in a body that was subject to pain and weariness and death: His Second Coming will be in the same body, but glorified and immortal. In the days of His flesh His presence was localized, and therefore comparatively few people beheld Him; in the coming days "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. i. 7). His former advent led Him to a judgment seat as a prisoner; at His next Coming He will Himself set up a judgment seat and sit upon it (Matt. xxv. 31). He was nailed to a cross as a criminal; He will be crowned as King of the whole universe. Without

question we look for His visible, literal and personal return.

(2) Whilst there is to be this visible manifestation of our Blessed Lord to the whole world, and He is to take to Himself the government and reign over a kingdom of perfect holiness, yet, before the establishment of that kingdom He is to come and take His own people unto Himself. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52). Then, as we have already seen in 1 Thess. iv., the Lord Himself is to descend from heaven, and all believers who have been laid to rest in the graves, and all who are still alive when He comes, are, together, to meet Him in the air. This is what is usually termed "the Rapture" of the Church, and in the following pages an effort will be made to show what the result of the rapture will be, so far as the Lord's people are concerned. But all who have rejected the gracious invitations of the Gospel, and have refused allegiance to Him, will be left behind when Christ thus takes away His followers, and for them will follow days of unparalleled tribulation, when all the powers of darkness will exercise unhindered sway in the world, and when unbridled cruelty, tyranny, and lawlessness will prevail throughout the nations of the earth.

(3) The Lord will return *suddenly and unexpectedly.* Again and again this fact is emphasized. Both His

coming *for* His saints and His coming *with them* to establish His Kingdom will take place when the world is following its normal pursuits. Men will be engrossed in the business and pleasures of life, when, without warning, the children of God will be removed from their midst. And when, later, the time comes for the Lord to lead forth His angels and the host of the redeemed at His descent to the world, His return will again take men unawares. See how He Himself pictures the scene. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, also, as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke xvii. 26-30).

(4) The Second Coming of Christ will bring about the overthrow of all the forces of evil, and the establishment of peace, prosperity and holiness throughout the world. Satan is to be confined for a thousand years; his agents, the Beast and the False Prophet of Rev. xiii., are to be destroyed; and everything

that would be opposed to the righteousness of God will be brought into complete subjection.

> Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run;
> His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

And though at the end of the millennial reign Satan is to be loosed for a season, and will make one final effort to overthrow the Kingdom and the purposes of God, yet his rebellion will speedily be crushed, and he and his followers utterly and finally subdued (Rev. xx. 7-10). We cannot now discuss the question as to why this last revolt will be permitted. It would appear, however, as if it is intended to be a final demonstration of the awful fact that the heart of man is, by nature, so utterly depraved that even under the most favourable conditions of existence, and with the most beneficent Ruler the world has ever known, sinners will still seize any opportunity to defy God.

But, in any case, the Lord will triumph gloriously, and after the setting up of the great white throne, and the execution of judgment upon all whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. xx. 11-15), the eternal age of bliss unspeakable and inconceivable will be ushered in, and the new heaven and the new earth will be established for ever.

CHAPTER II

The Church Militant

Having defined—in the preceding pages—the meaning we attach to the expression "the Second Coming of Christ," we now proceed to consider what is indicated by the term "The Church."

Nowadays it is frequently used in far too vague and indefinite a sense, and is often altogether misapplied. We hear it said, for example, that some young man is "about to enter the Church," by which it is meant that he purposes to enter the ministry. But surely the ministry is not the Church itself! Clergy and ministers of every kind and degree are, at best, but a part of the Church, while, we hope it is not uncharitable to suggest, there are even some who have taken upon themselves the sacred office who are not members of the true Church of Christ at all.

There are many who speak of some particular Church, such as the Church of England, or the Church of Rome, as "*the Church*" to the exclusion of all other denominations; indeed, far too often it is denied that other bodies of Christians are, or can be, described as part of the Church. Have the thousands

upon thousands of whole-hearted followers of Christ who are thus excluded really no right or title to be considered as part of His Church? Will they have no share in the glory that is to be bestowed upon the Church in the days to come, because they have not been members of the National Church of this land, or of the Church that has its headquarters at Rome? The bare suggestion is an outrage upon the feelings of true Christendom, and an insult to the all-embracing love of Him Who bought the whole Church with His precious blood. But this use of the expression "the Church" is an indication of the fact that, in thinking of the future that lies before the members of that body, it is of paramount importance to understand just what the term means, and how the Church is constituted.

It will be known, of course, to most of our readers that the word "Church," as used in the New Testament, is the translation of the Greek word *ecclesia*, which literally means "people who are called out—an assembly of called-out ones." Its use is not confined to a Christian organization, for it is used, *e.g.*, in connection with the town's meeting at Ephesus, where the town clerk, addressing the tumultuous crowd of the worshippers of Diana, said that the law was open to Demetrius and the craftsmen if they had any charge to bring against any man. But, he added, "If ye enquire anything concerning other

matters it shall be determined in a lawful (or ordinary) assembly (ecclesia)" (Acts xix. 39).

We read, too, of "The Church" (ecclesia) in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38) referring to the children of Israel, who had been called out of Egypt, though there was no church amongst them, of course, in the modern acceptation of the term.

When, therefore, we speak of the Church we refer primarily to those who, by God's grace, have been "called out"; that is, who, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, have been led out of darkness into light, out of condemnation into salvation, out of bondage into the liberty of the Gospel. All such, whatever their denominational names or distinctions, constitute the true Church of God. Just as a kingdom, though divided into many countries, or towns, or villages, is yet but one kingdom, because all are governed by the same king and subject to the same laws, so, as an old writer says, "The Church is one, because it liveth by one and the same Spirit; it is ruled by one and the same Lord and professeth one and the same faith; hath one and the same hope, and hath been baptized into one and the same baptism."

There is, after all, but one true Church, and of this Christ is the only Head, and if we are His subjects we are members of His Kingdom. Baxter used to say that for sects to quarrel as to which of them is the true Church is as mad as to dispute whether

the hall, or kitchen, or parlour, or coal-house is the true house—whereas the best is but a part and the house contains them all. Just as a rainbow encircles within its arms city and suburb, palace and hut, cathedral and lowly meeting-house, so the covenant of grace embraces within the same arms of mercy all believers, totally irrespective of minor differences. The sun, high in the heavens, shines on all the garden, heeding not the fences, which, as Newman Hall said, only serve to cast a dark shadow on the beds they shut off from the rest; and showers fall impartially upon all alike. So the smile of the great Lord and Master of us all rests upon each and every one who is a true believer, whatever his denominational name, and the gracious Spirit pours upon all alike the refreshing rain of His influence. Ever since the day of Pentecost God has been building His Church, and the process is still going on. The Gospel has been preached, and is still being preached, far and wide, and wherever it has been proclaimed, in all ages and in all lands, some have yielded to the message, and thus been "called out"—in other words, have become members of the one great Church of Christ.

In this Church all distinctions of race, colour, nationality or age are lost. Men, women and children, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, of every kingdom and tribe under the sun, are included in the term "the Church," if, by faith, they have passed from death

unto life and have become the children of God. This great fellowship of the saints—the union in Christ of Jew and Gentile—was a mystery that was hidden in God until revealed to the Apostle Paul by the Holy Spirit, and although it has become a commonplace in our day to speak of unity in Christ, yet, to the early Church, it was a tremendous revelation.

Another way in which the true Church might be described would be to say that it consists of all whose names have been "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. xxi. 27). As we consider the use of this, and similar expressions, in the Word of God, we are led to the conclusion that the reference is to the inscription of the names of citizens upon a burgess roll. We read, for example, in Isaiah iv. 3, that "he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." And St. Paul, after speaking of the fact that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. iii. 20, R.V.), goes on to refer (iv. 3) to his fellow-labourers "whose names are in the book of life." In the Epistle to the Hebrews, too, we are reminded that we "are come unto the city of the living God . . . to the general assembly and the Church of the first-born which are written (literally, enrolled) in heaven" (xii. 22, 23). Evidently the great essential for membership in the Church of Christ is not to be enrolled upon the books

of some religious organization alone, but to be entered upon the burgess roll of the city of the great King, in the pages of the book that contains the names of all who are truly living, having been born again by the Spirit of God. All such, united to Christ and to one another by the same blessed Spirit, form the one true Church of the living God.

Let us repeat, then, the fact that the Church is not one body of Christians as distinct from others—one section to the exclusion of all other divisions of the Lord's great army. There are various regiments, but the whole army is one, under our one Commander. The Church is the whole body of believers and embraces all who believe in Jesus Christ ; in His absolute Deity and His perfect humanity ; in His atoning death upon the Cross, and His resurrection from the dead ; in His ascension to the right hand of God and His constant intercession there ; in His presence with His loved ones now, and in His coming again. In a word, the Church is the whole company of the blood-bought, redeemed people whoever they may be, wherever they may live, or whatever may be their rank or condition in life.

The full extent of the Church will only be known when, from every clime and nation, the Lord gathers to Himself those who are His, but very wonderful will be the revelation then.

In the meantime the great purpose of God in the

present age is the calling out of His people, and little by little the Church is being built. It will be noted that a distinction must be drawn between the Church visible—the body of professing Christians—and the true or invisible Church, and it is all-important that this should not be lost sight of in our thoughts about the future of that Church in connection with the Lord's Return. In the visible Church there are many who bring dishonour upon the name of the Lord Who bought them, and who show by their lives that they know little—if anything—of the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The visible Church will ever be much larger than the true, invisible Church of which we are now specially thinking.

In every cornfield there are weeds—yet we call them cornfields, and not fields of weeds. A heap of wheat may have chaff mingled with it, yet it is called wheat. Even so, though the visible Church consists of good and bad, yet "the Lord knoweth them that are His." He Himself made it clear by several of His parables that the evil would ever mingle with the good until the time of harvest. Let us rejoice in the fact that we are not called upon to judge others, or to separate wheat from tares, but let us pray continually that they who are only nominally Christians may yet be brought into vital fellowship with Christ, and so become a real part of His Church.

We must not lose sight of one further fact in thinking

of the Church, and that is its miraculous preservation all through the ages. It has, indeed, been called upon to pass through the fires, but it has never been consumed. It has been much tossed upon the stormy sea of persecution, but has never been overwhelmed, for Christ has been in it. When, therefore, the tempest howls most loudly against the Church, and we are tempted to utter cries of distress and unbelief, let us remember that our faith is far more in danger of sinking than the cause and the Church of God, for " God is in the midst of her . . . God shall help her, and that right early."

To the world, the Church may appear but weak and feeble, and not a few attempts have been and are being made, even to-day, to overthrow it, but it is built upon an immovable foundation, and in controlling and overruling all the hellish hate and fury with which the Church has been attacked Jehovah has vindicated His Word, manifested His grace, and shown His wisdom and His power. Nor will He fail in the days to come until " guided through the ocean of time she rests upon the mountains of eternal love, where there shall be no more sea, nor clouds, nor tempests to disturb the serenity of the celestial regions of purity and bliss."

In the future, as in the past, if Christ should still tarry, the wars and conquests of kings, the ambitious schemes of politicians, and every adverse influence that might seem to threaten the security of the

Church will be overruled for the wider extension and the more efficient establishment of His own Church. And so, until the dawn of the great day which is the increasing hope of the Church—the day when Christ shall come for His own, and the Church militant shall become the Church triumphant—we may rest in the quiet assurance that not even the feeblest member of the Church shall perish, not one grain of wheat shall fall to the ground, but that, when He descends into the air and calls His people to Himself, all who have known and loved and served Him here will rise to share in the glory that lies beyond.

CHAPTER III

The Church "Caught Up"

So far we have discussed the meaning of the two expressions, "The Coming of Christ" and "The Church"; we can now proceed to consider how the return of the Lord will affect the members of His Church. In 1 Cor. x. 32 the Apostle divides the inhabitants of the world into three great classes—the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God. The Second Advent will have a very different effect upon each of these three. To the Jews the return of Christ will mean national restoration to their own land: deliverance from overwhelming tribulation; the conversion of the whole race, leading to their acknowledgment of Him as their Messiah; their establishment in peace, safety and prosperity; and their employment as missionaries to the whole world. Christ's Coming will bring about the accomplishment of prophecies hitherto unfulfilled, and the Jews—God's chosen people—will then enter upon the riches of their inheritance under the personal reign of Him Whom once they rejected and crucified.

To the Gentile nations, as such, the Advent of Christ

will mean the complete overthrow of the political world system as then in existence. He is the One Who was represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. ii.) as a stone cut out of a mountain without hands, Whose coming brake in pieces the image, which Daniel interpreted as meaning that, when the time comes, God will "break in pieces and consume" the kingdoms of which he had been speaking.

But, when that comes to pass, then shall "the God of Heaven set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . it shall stand for ever" (Dan. ii. 44 and 45), and this Kingdom-age will begin when, in glory and majesty and power, Christ will descend to the earth. The Gentile nations shall then be gathered together for the judgment foretold in Matt. xxv., receiving rewards or condemnation according to their treatment of the Jews—Christ's brethren after the flesh. This will be followed by world-wide revival, and by the participation of all in the blessings of the millennial Kingdom.

But for the Church of Christ there is a future of yet greater honour and glory. When Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, his heart was specially set upon his own brother Benjamin, and he arranged that a far more generous portion should be set before him than before any of the others (Gen. xliii. 34). So, when the Lord manifests Himself, whilst the whole

world will share in the glory of His reign, yet for believers a special portion has been prepared, and we now proceed to ascertain what the infallible Word has to say upon the subject.

(1) Christ's Second Coming will mean a *sudden translation* of the Church as foretold in 1 Thess. iv., 1 Cor. xv., and other passages. We gather from these that suddenly, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the whole Church of Christ, past and present, will be taken up to meet the Lord in the air.

Those who have fallen asleep in Christ will rise first from amongst the dead, whilst the living saints will be "caught up" together with them. There are to be two resurrections—one of believers, when the Lord comes for them, and one of the wicked dead at the end of the millennial reign, and the failure to recognize, or to remember this fact, accounts for much of the prevalent misconception as to the order of events connected with the Second Coming.

These two resurrections will, of course, include all that are in the graves—but they are very clearly distinguished in the Word of God. The "first resurrection" (Rev. xx. 5 and 6) is brought before us as the resurrection of the just, the resurrection of life, and this will take place at the coming of Christ into the air for His people. (See 1 Cor. xv. 22, 23; 1 Thess. iv. 14-17; and Rev. xx. 4). This first resurrection will include the saints of all the ages—those who served

God in Old Testament days, those who believed on His Son in New Testament times, and all those who during the present dispensation have been enrolled in the Church of the living God. It would seem, too, that many who will have suffered martyrdom for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ during the great tribulation—which will follow the rapture of the saints—will also be raised at the beginning of the millennial reign, when Christ comes to the earth, and this will be the completion of the "first resurrection." The martyrs mentioned are evidently people who will be converted after the Church has been removed from the earth. Brought to conviction by the fulfilment of prophecies they have known in the past, but never heeded before the coming of Christ for His Church, they will be led to accept Him as their Saviour and King after that event has clearly and forcibly demonstrated the truth of God's Word; and so, in infinite mercy, although left behind to endure the fearful persecution that will break out under the reign of Antichrist, they will be kept faithful to the end, even unto death, and their faithfulness will be rewarded by their sharing in the first resurrection, and in the glories of the millennial Kingdom.

The second resurrection will be that of the wicked dead, who will be left in their graves until the end of the thousand years, and will then be raised to participate in the judgment of the great white throne (Rev.

xx. 11 and 12). But for the believer that judgment can have no terrors. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1), for all their sins have already been judged, and the penalty paid in the death of their Lord. A thousand years before the great white throne is set up the members of His Church will have received their new and spiritual bodies, and have been sharing in the rule of Christ, the Universal King. We shall have to speak later of the transformation of the bodies of the saints; at the moment we are thinking only of the outstanding fact that at Christ's coming into the air they will be brought up from the grave. Then will be accomplished the desire of the Apostle as we find it expressed in Phil. iii. 11—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." Paul knew, of course, that all must ultimately be raised from the dead, and that therefore he would assuredly attain to *a* resurrection. But, literally, his words mean, "That I might attain unto the out-resurrection—out from among the dead." He longed to have a part in the first resurrection, and so be amongst those who, at the summons of the Lord, will leave their graves, and go to meet Him in the air.

This sudden translation will not be confined, however, to the believers who have fallen asleep in Christ. The living saints, too, are to have a share in it.

It would be futile to attempt any description of the

scene that will be enacted when the followers of the Lamb will, in the supreme moment of the ages, be snatched away from earth to be with Him in His immediate presence, seeing Him no longer by faith, but face to face, and entering with Him into His glory. Very few, but very vivid, are the particulars given of that great event. We read: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51 and 52). Again, we are told that when the Lord Himself descends from Heaven with a shout, "the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 16 and 17).

Imagination might run riot in attempting to visualize the events of that great day. We shall do well, however, to restrain our thoughts lest we venture into regions of detail unwarranted by the Scriptures. Yet this much is clearly revealed. Some day, and as many believe, some day soon, whilst to all outward appearance "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" and whilst men are pursuing their ordinary avocations, or engaging in their customary recreations, at such an hour as they think not, the Lord Jesus will come into the air, and

at His coming, the believers who have been laid to rest in the silence of the grave will break the bonds of death at His call. On land and sea, in forest and jungle, from city cemetery and village churchyard, from every part of the world, will rise the Hosts of the Lord, who have been sleeping in Him. Out from the darkness into the glorious light of His own presence; out from the bondage of death into the liberty of immortality; out from corruption into incorruption, will ascend the followers of the Lamb to meet Him on Whom alone, during their lifetime, their hearts and hopes were fixed. And, at the same moment, from palace and hovel, from temple and market-place, from all ranks and conditions of people, and from all the nations of the world, drawn upwards by Christ's own magnetic force, the living saints will be "caught up"—separated from all who have been living only for this world—and will be brought instantaneously into the fulness of His glory. However opposed such a thought may be to the experience of humanity, it is based upon the sure promise of the Word, and we confidently await the coming of Christ and the translation of His people.

It may be asked whether others who are not "caught up" at the Rapture will see the Lord when He thus comes for His own. We cannot tell. On such a point dogmatism is worse than foolish. But, judging by analogy, we might conclude that none will see Him

at the translation of His people except those who are actually taken up to be with Him. He has never been seen by the world since His resurrection, although He showed Himself again and again to His disciples. In 1 Cor. xv. 5-8 we have a list of those to whom He appeared after His resurrection, but it is evident that He was hidden from the view of the world at large. Indeed, St. Peter, in his sermon in the house of Cornelius, expressly declared that God raised Jesus the third day "and gave Him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead" (Acts x. 40, 41, R.V.). Even so, He will probably not show Himself to any but His own until He comes in manifested glory to the world, and *then* "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. i. 7). We conclude, therefore, that the translation of the saints will not mean a revelation of Christ to the world at large, but merely the sudden disappearance of large numbers of people from their homes, their business, or the circle of their acquaintances. Then, after an interval, when the first wave of surprise and consternation has swept over the world, people will settle down again, lulled and pacified by the arts of Satan, and will begin to say to their leaders—as the children of Israel said to Aaron when Moses tarried in the mount with God—"Make us gods, for as for these men we know not what has become of them."

Sudden translation will be followed, for the Church, by (2) *complete transformation.* Have we any indication as to the extent of this change? As we search the Scriptures for an answer to this question we come across many intimations of the fact that the whole being of the believers—body, mind and character—will be included in the transformation, and time spent in the examination of some of these passages will not be wasted.

(*a*) That our *bodies* are to be changed when the Lord comes for His saints is certain. See for example, Phil. iii. 20 and 21, R.V. "Our citizenship is in Heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory." "The body of our humiliation!" What an apt description of this tabernacle of flesh! Our present body is truly one of humiliation, for it is one in which we constantly grieve our blessed Lord, and in it we carry about with us the sin, the weakness and the suffering that are the result of the Fall. If the Lord should tarry, these bodies of ours will be laid in the grave, and will be resolved into their original dust and ashes. But the "body of our humiliation" is to be transformed into one that shall be like unto "the body of His glory"—or His glorious body. Whether we have passed beyond the veil when He comes, and our bodies have been laid to rest,

or whether we remain amongst those who are alive when He calls away His people, we shall, in either case, rise to meet Him "in the air," drawn towards Him by His own all-prevailing power, and in that marvellous moment we shall be completely "changed." We may safely conclude that in this wonderful assurance we have the pledge of immortality. This mortal is to put on the robes of immortality: this corruptible body to assume the garment of incorruption (1 Cor. xv. 53). "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him"; and we have His own gracious promise "Because I live ye shall live also." The power of death will be completely overthrown—and from the first glimpse of the Lord in His glory we shall be free from all the ravages of disease, and from all the "ills that flesh is heir to" throughout the endless ages of eternity.

We learn, further, that our bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies, even as Christ's after His resurrection. We shall probably then be capable of intense rapidity of motion, and of unhindered progression. Our minds revert to the upper room in Jerusalem, where the disciples gathered, and from which, with scrupulous care, they excluded all strangers, closing and barring the door "for fear of the Jews." And yet suddenly the room was seen to contain the form of One Who had been invisible a moment before.

No closed door could bar His way—He was there of Whom they were thinking and speaking, and Whose death they had been bemoaning. "Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them"—His body, no longer subject to the limitations of the flesh, had passed through all barriers unhindered. And when we are like Him in this respect we shall be able to fulfil our Lord's behests with inconceivable rapidity, for, for us, time and space will have ceased to be hindrances to the fulfilment of His commands.

Then, too, the new body will be free for ever from all pain and suffering and weakness. The Lord "shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. xxi. 4, R.V.). Here, surely, is a source of greatest comfort and consolation. We are now subject to tears springing from a thousand ills—from disappointments and discouragements, from fear and failure, from sorrow and sickness, from broken friendships and bitter bereavements. But when the Lord returns for His people He will wipe away every tear, and the transformed body will know nothing of all that now so often mars the joy of life.

(*b*) We may yet go further and say that not only shall we have perfected bodies, but also that our *minds* will be brought into complete conformity with God. *Now* we are subject to doubts and fears, to depression and gloom, to ignorance and unbelief. "Now we see through a glass (R.V., 'in a mirror')

darkly, but then face to face ; now I know in part, but then shall I know fully (margin) even as also I have been known " (1 Cor. xiii. 12 and 13). There is much in our personal experience to-day that is perplexing, and that tests our faith to the uttermost, but, as the Master told Simon Peter long ago, whilst we cannot understand it now we shall do so hereafter (John xiii. 7). And the glorious " hereafter " of perfect comprehension will dawn for us at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

(*c*) Nor is even this all, for transformed bodies and enlightened minds shall be accompanied by perfected *characters*. " We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is " (1 John iii. 2). What a striking and triumphant assertion. Like Him, because we see Him ! It is as we behold Him even here and now that we are " changed into the same image," but how much more complete will be the transformation when we actually and literally behold Him with unclouded face—with not a shadow or a cloud between. The same thought is presented in Rev. xxii. 4, where we read that His servants " shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads "—name being indicative of character. We may grow more and more like Him every day, even whilst we pass through this world, if we but keep Him ever before our eyes. But when at length we gaze into the face of the King as

He comes clothed in all the transcendent beauty of His holiness and love, then His character shall become ours—we shall share His nature and become like Him to a degree that is to-day absolutely inconceivable.

If only for the sake of the transformation that is to be the lot of the believer individually at the Lord's return we might well pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." But not only will there be a personal and individual change such as has been indicated; at Christ's coming into the air as the Bridegroom for His bride, the whole Church will be transformed. He will present it to Himself, "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27). Every blot and blemish that now disfigures the bride of Christ will be eternally put away from her when the glory dawns, whilst her fair countenance shall be free from "wrinkles"—the signs of care and of decay—and be adorned with the beauty of God's own eternal youth.

And so, caught up to be with Christ, and having entered into the fulness of joy at His right hand, the Church will be finally and for ever separated from all the struggle incidental to existence in this present evil world. For all her warfare will be ended, all error and temptation entirely banished. The things that to-day so sorely bewilder and perplex the people of God will all have been left behind. Disappointments

and discouragements will never again be experienced. Sin, in every shape and form, will be a thing of the past, to be known no more, and the joy of the translated and transformed believers will never again be shadowed by any of the clouds that now, too often, interpose between us and Him Whose presence brings abiding gladness and victory and peace.

CHAPTER IV

The Church at the Judgment Seat of Christ

The sudden translation and the complete transformation of the Church of Christ at His coming will be followed by the wonderful glorification of the whole body of believers. Free from all stains and blemishes, and brought into the immediate and unveiled presence of her Lord and Master, the Church will then enter upon the fulness of her inheritance, and be crowned with a glory that baffles all imagination.

It would appear that in the radiance by which she will then be surrounded, and of which she will then become a partaker, the Church of Jesus Christ will enter at last into real and unbroken fellowship with Him. And this marvellous fellowship will find expression in two ways during the interval that will elapse between the coming of Christ *for* His saints and His manifestation when He comes *with* His saints to set up His Kingdom. First there will be the judgment of believers at the "bema," or, as the word is translated in Rom. xiv. 10 and 2 Cor. v. 10, "the judgment seat of Christ," and, secondly, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

We are treading here upon very hallowed ground, and it becomes us to approach such themes with the utmost reverence and humility. For the revelation of the events of that intervening period is so limited, and the references to them are so scattered, that we dare not presume, as we meditate upon them, to attempt any definite statement of their order, or of the details that will characterize them. But there is, at any rate, sufficient revealed to us in the pages of Holy Writ to justify us in seeking to form some idea of what will transpire whilst the Church is with her Lord, before He comes back to the world.

Believers shall then stand before the judgment seat of Christ—not that they may be judged on account of sin, and to ascertain their eternal destiny, but for the testing of their works, and the bestowal of rewards for all true, loyal and loving service. The judgment seat here referred to must not be confused with the throne of the King Who will judge the nations when He comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, and separates the "sheep" from the "goats," setting the former on His right hand and the others on His left (Matt. xxv. 31-46). That passage evidently refers to the judgment of the nations in existence at the time when the Lord descends to the earth. His verdict upon them—His approval or condemnation of their conduct—will apparently depend upon the way in which they have treated His brethren

after the flesh, the Jews, during their time of great tribulation under Antichrist.

Nor must it be confused with the "great white throne" that is to be set up at the end of the thousand years of Christ's millennial reign upon the earth (Rev. xx. 11-15). For then the dead, small and great, are to stand before Him—all those who were left in their graves at the time of the first resurrection, or who die in unbelief afterwards.

It is important to notice the emphasis laid upon the word "dead" in these few verses—"I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God"; "the dead were judged"; "the sea gave up the dead"; "death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them." It is these who are to be judged before the great white throne, when the final and irreversible verdict of the Judge will be pronounced upon all whose names are not written in the book of life. But in a very emphatic sense it is the *living* who are to stand before the judgment seat of Christ—they who have been raised out from among the dead at the first resurrection, and the saints who have never experienced the death of the body, but who have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air. For these there can be no sentence of condemnation, for they will already have received their new and glorified bodies, and will have become like their Lord. But the "bema" has not inaptly been compared to the umpire's seat—the place from

which, in the ancient days, the prizes were awarded to those who had taken part in the games of the period —to the wrestlers, the racers, and so forth.

As there is not a little misconception, in the minds of many Christians even, as to this tribunal, and a kind of instinctive and unreasoning dread as to what will transpire there, it may be well to remind our readers of the fact that it is quite impossible that the judgment seat of Christ is a throne at which our *sins* are to be passed in review, and a verdict pronounced accordingly. We rejoice to know that all the penalty due on account of our sins has already been paid by our gracious Saviour, as He hung upon the Cross on Calvary—"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24). "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 6). He was "the Lamb of God which taketh (beareth) away the sin of the world" (John i. 29), and "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. ciii. 12).

In addition to such assurances as these—and they abound—we read in John v. 24, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment (R.V.), but is passed from death unto life." Part of the new covenant under which the Church of God lives to-day, is that our sins and our iniquities are to be remembered no more (Heb. viii. 12); God casts them

behind His back (Isa. xxxviii. 17); they are blotted out as a thick cloud (Isa. xliv. 22) which dissolves and disappears to be seen no more. All the sins of the believer are cast into "the depths of the sea" (Mic. vii. 19), where they can never again be found. If, therefore, by the immeasurable anguish of the Cross, Christ has already borne the judgment of our sins, and paid the penalty in all its fulness; if God Himself so completely forgets our sins that they can never again come even to His remembrance; if, in the wondrous love of God, they have been absolutely and finally done away with, we may well ask how is it possible that we should ever have to answer for them when we see our Master face to face?

And yet it is undoubtedly true that we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But the reason for this is given in 2 Cor. v. 10: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." It is not the *sins* of the believer that are to pass under review, but his *works* that are to be tested.

This is more fully described in 1 Cor. iii., where, it will be noted, the emphasis is upon the word "work." The believer is compared to a builder, who, by his work, is day by day erecting an edifice that will in due time be tested by fire; and according to the result of that testing he shall receive a reward or

suffer loss—yet "he himself shall be saved" (ver. 15). The foundation is good and true and abiding, for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (ver. 11); but all the works of a Christian, even when he has such a foundation to build upon, are not always such as will stand the future trial. It will be noticed that there are two classes of work mentioned in this chapter—those which will prove indestructible when tested by "fire," like "gold, silver, precious (or costly) stones"; and those that will perish, even as "wood, hay, stubble" are consumed when a flame touches them. It may be asked what is meant here by "fire" as the agent that is to try our work. Opinions vary as to the precise interpretation of the symbol, but perhaps the most probable suggestion is that it represents the Holy Spirit.

The works done in the body will endure or perish according as they have, or have not, been wrought under the influence, the guidance, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Works of love, and gentleness, and self-sacrifice—all that spring from the operation of the Holy Ghost within our hearts—will, without question, receive an abundant reward; whilst those that spring merely from natural energy, or a desire for the approval of our fellows, or from any other motive than a real love for our Lord will utterly perish. For after all, it is the motive behind the act

that gives it real value. Much of the fussy activity that often characterizes even the members of the Christian Church has no deeper motive than a desire to stand well in the opinion of our fellows, and is therefore of no real value, and lacks permanence. On the other hand, many a poor, infirm or obscure believer is building an edifice that will endure for ever by acts that, however small and insignificant in themselves, are yet the outcome of an abiding and all-pervading love for the Lord Who bought him at the cost of His own life. Such works will be marvellously rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

The writer has often ventured to illustrate this point by reference to an incident that occurred many years ago. He was sitting in his study, writing at his desk, when he heard a tap at the door. Recognizing the knock as that of his oldest laddie, who was then quite a little fellow, he called out, "Come in," and in a moment was looking down into the face of the boy who stood by his side with his hands behind his back, and an air of great mystery on his countenance. "Well, laddie, what is it; what do you want?" was the natural enquiry; to which came the response, shy, mischievous, child-like, "Daddy, I've got something for you." "What is it laddie?" "Guess, daddy." Daddy obediently began to guess, mentioning all kinds of things probable and improbable, meanwhile noting the merriment in the

boy's eyes as again and again he shook his head and said, " No, daddy ; try again." At length came the enquiry, " Shall I tell you, daddy ? " and, permission being given, the little fellow drew from behind his back a bit of canvas, just a few inches square, on which he had endeavoured to portray in wool-work some fish or animal. Its recognition made a great demand upon the imagination, and the work was altogether so soiled, so crumpled and so incomplete that as he held it up for inspection a smile of amusement crept into " daddy's " face. In a moment this was detected by the eager eyes looking up into his, and the little tender heart, so susceptible to the slightest indications of approval or otherwise, was wounded. The tears sprang up into the deep wells that gazed so tenderly into the father's face, and then the boy said, with a touch of reproof in his tone, " Daddy, I did that for you *because I love you so much.*"

In a moment that piece of work was completely transformed. To the father's eyes it was no longer a marred and worthless offering, but a precious gift that was eloquent of inexpressible affection, and, ever since, that bit of work has been constantly and lovingly treasured. The boy has been for years in the Home-land, for " God took him," but his love-gift is still greatly prized, and still carries with it the lesson we all need to learn. It is not the greatness nor the grandeur of the service, as judged by the world, that

has the promise of reward, but the motive that inspires it. If we can truly say, "Lord, I have sought to serve Thee in some little way because I love Thee so much," our work will not fail of its recompense. Perhaps the work has been so insignificant and so unostentatious that it has altogether escaped the observation of others. Perhaps it has been but the speaking of a gentle word to some troubled heart, or the wiping away of the tears of some mourner, or the relief of some needy one, or the effort to lead some little child to Christ. In any case, the work in all probability has been but poorly done, has been marred by much of self and sin, and is altogether unworthy of our Divine Master. But if we can honestly look up into His face, and, whilst confessing the demerit of the work, say it was at least prompted by love for Him, may we not believe that, to the Heavenly Father, that word or deed will be transfigured, even as the bit of wool-work was to the earthly parent? Is He less loving, or less mindful of the grateful affection of His own children? Surely not. All faithful service will meet with a fulness of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Salvation is all of grace: we cannot earn that by any works of our own: it is the gift of God. But after we have received the gift we can earn rewards to be bestowed in the day of Christ, by endeavouring to glorify Him here, and by our loyal, loving service.

The question next arises as to what rewards will

be bestowed when the Church stands before the judgment seat of Christ. In His parable of the nobleman who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return" our Lord depicts the nobleman as giving instructions to his servants to trade, until he comes back again, with certain "pounds" that he left with them. When he returned he called his servants before him "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading"; and to those whom he could address as "good" servants, who had been faithful in the discharge of their responsibilities in his absence, he gave authority over certain cities (Luke xix. 11-19). Does this imply that, when the Lord returns and calls His servants before Him to judge their faithfulness during His absence, He will reward their works by giving them, in some way, authority over some part of His great universe? It may well be so. With the amplified powers that will be ours when the Lord calls us to meet Him in the air, and in our glorified spiritual bodies, capable of incredibly rapid motion that nothing will be able to hinder or obstruct, we shall perhaps be appointed as His deputies in some portion of His vast, illimitable, universal empire. At any rate, we are to "reign with Him." But we must deal more fully with this point in a future chapter.

In the New Testament there are four crowns held out as rewards to God's faithful people. It is said

that the Pope of Rome wears a triple crown or diadem, as indicative of his supposed authority in heaven, earth and hell, respectively. Without pausing to point out the utter fallacy of this claim, we may say that when the members of Christ's Church come to be glorified they will be adorned and endowed with even greater authority still, for theirs is a fourfold crown. Let us seek to examine these.

There is (1) the "crown of rejoicing." St. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonian converts (1 Thess. ii. 19), says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His Coming? For ye are our glory and joy." The Apostle was looking on to the time when he, and those who by his ministry had been brought to know and love the Lord, should rise to meet Him at His coming and so be for ever with Him. He knew that then his crown of rejoicing would be the sight of the redeemed ones who had been rescued from idolatry and sin, through the preaching of the Word. He declared that they were his glory and joy even at the time he wrote, but this was to be no transient satisfaction. So convinced was he that the Lord would keep His own safely, and at His coming call every one of them to meet Him, that he looked forward to seeing them all again in the great day of the Lord's Return, and knew that the sight of these converts, and the knowledge that he had been used

to lead them to Christ would be, to him, one of his chief joys throughout eternity.

Now this is a joy that may be the lot of every member of the Church, a crown that all ought to seek to obtain. It is to be feared that very many of the Lord's followers are content to leave the work of winning souls to the recognized and official leaders of the Church. They do not realize that any responsibility rests upon them in the matter of seeking the eternal welfare of those around them. Kind and gracious and gentle and loving though they may be, living lives of the strictest integrity, and in many ways really seeking to know and do their Lord's will, yet in this they fail—they lack the true evangelistic spirit that would lead them to be diligent in their efforts to win souls. They have never become "fishers of men." Day by day they have had opportunities of witnessing for their Master, and of testifying to His saving and keeping power, but have never definitely sought to bring anyone into the Kingdom. Would that, as the days speed by, and the "coming of the Lord draweth nigh," His people might awaken to the call for personal ministry, and so, by the blessing of God, be able to look forward to the time when they too shall have bestowed upon them the "crown of rejoicing."

(2) There is also awaiting those who are faithful to their trust a "crown of righteousness." "Hence-

forth," says the Apostle, " there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing " (2 Tim. iv. 8). Here and now those who entertain the hope of Christ's return are blessedly influenced and controlled by it. St. John tells us that " when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him (set on Him) purifieth himself, even as He is pure " (1 John iii. 2 and 3). If we live in the constant expectation of His coming, even the most monotonous duties of our daily existence will be completely transformed, and we shall seek, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all " to the glory of God." There is no incentive to Christian holiness and diligent service greater than that love to Christ that makes us long for His appearing.

An article from the pen of the Rev. C. H. Pridgeon, which appeared in the *Prophetic News*, tells how this great hope influenced the late Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston. " He had a large and rather worldly church. In place of looking to God for his messages he was accustomed to put a good deal of himself into them. One night, after labouring over his sermon, he retired, and dreamed that he was in the pulpit, preaching, when he noticed a Stranger, in homely garb, enter and take a seat near one of the deacons. He was

attracted by the Stranger's face, and desired to meet Him after the service, but when he reached the deacon's pew he found the Stranger had gone. He asked the deacon if he knew the Stranger, and the deacon said, 'Yes; did you not know Him? It was Jesus of Nazareth.' His first thought was 'I wonder how He liked my sermon, and how He liked our operatic choir and church arrangements?' Dr. Gordon sincerely wished that some things had been different in his sermon and in the church. Although that was only a dream, the impression that Jesus might come at any time never wore away, but ever deepened and influenced his whole life, and gradually wrought a change in the church to which he ministered." Even so will it always be. If we love His appearing, our lives will be transformed, our characters purified, our service glorified. And when we see Him, at His appearing for His saints, we shall receive a "crown of righteousness."

(3) A "crown of life" is the third crown that is offered to the people of God as one of our great rewards. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James i. 12). "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. ii. 10). If we think of temptation as being an allurement to evil, an inducement to dishonour and deny our Lord, even

in that sense the promise is full of rich encouragement. We are not to yield, but to resist, if we are to gain the victor's crown. We may feel it necessary to give way to temptation in order to succeed in life, or to gain influence, or to enjoy certain pleasures. But that is the way to death, not life. By allowing the temptation to prevail we should forfeit the crown of life, which is only to be given to those who are "faithful unto death."

In the article by Mr. Pridgeon, to which reference has already been made, there is another illustration that may be quoted here. It is the account of an incident in one of the early persecutions of the Church, which may be true, or may be partly legendary. Forty of the people of God, we are told, had refused to recant and to deny their Lord at the bidding of the Roman Emperor, and these were all condemned to be exposed unclad, through all the horrors of a bitterly cold winter night, on the surface of a frozen lake. Rough Roman soldiers were placed on guard with authority to release any who would give up his Christianity. As the night slowly dragged on the captain of the band of soldiers heard some beautiful singing, and, looking up, saw a company of angels coming to carry the spirit of the first martyr that fell frozen. He caught their song, "Forty martyrs and forty crowns: He that is faithful unto death shall receive the crown of life." Again and again during the long night he saw the angels

descend and ascend, and heard their triumphant song.

Suddenly he heard some one approaching. It was one of his men, and he was bringing the last of the forty Christians, who said he was ready to recant. The Roman soldier looked at him in disdain, and addressed him thus, "Oh, if you had seen what I have seen to-night you would never recant. You may take my garments and I will take your place on the lake; for I accept Christ as my Saviour." The exchange was effected, and it was not long before the angels again took up the refrain "Forty martyrs and forty crowns: He that is faithful unto death shall receive a crown of life," and it was the Roman soldier who received the fortieth crown. The crown of life is not promised to those who yield when tempted, but to those who endure to the end.

We may take temptation in a wider sense and regard it as meaning trial, and so apply it to suffering of any kind for Christ's sake. When we are inclined to murmur at our losses and crosses, and think we are being hardly used, we should do well to recall the assurance that He Who permits the trial is ever with us, giving all needful grace to those who seek it, and keeping for us a crown of life in the land that lies beyond.

There is also (4) a "crown of glory." "And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter v. 4).

This, like the crown of rejoicing, is for workers, even as the crown of righteousness is for watchers and the crown of life for warriors. This reward, like the other three, is to be bestowed at the manifestation of Jesus Christ, when He reveals Himself to His Church and we stand before His judgment seat. But it is only for those who have faithfully fulfilled their tasks as His under-shepherds. If we have sought the wandering sheep, leading them to the fold of Christ, caring for and carrying the lambs of His flock, then we may, by His grace, look forward to the reception of this crown in the day when He takes account of His servants. Mr. Pridgeon illustrates this point by a story taken from one of Dr. S. D. Gordon's "Quiet Talks on Service," which is as follows: In one of the hill countries there was a shepherd, who, when folding his sheep one night, discovered that three were missing. He went to the kennel, where his faithful collie was lying with her young, and called her.

Pointing out into the darkness he told her to go and fetch them. With one longing look at her young, and an upward glance at her master, she started. She was gone a considerable time, and when she returned she had brought but two of the sheep. She had been torn by the thorns, and was evidently greatly fatigued. The shepherd went and recounted his sheep, but found there was still one missing. He went again to the kennel, though sorely grieved at the necessity for sending his dog out at so late an hour and on so

wild a night. When he spoke to her she looked up at him with eyes that said as plainly as possible, "Need I go again? Must I, tired out as I am, again face the wind and snow, and go and search for that one sheep that has strayed from the flock?" But the shepherd insisted, and the dog, with evident reluctance, and yet with due obedience, started, and this time was away for some three hours. Then she came back, badly bruised and bleeding, but bringing with her the lost sheep. The shepherd lifted up the sheep and bore it to the fold, ministering to its needs. He then visited the kennel to see to his dog, intending to reward it by a kind and gentle word and by a caress. But when he spoke the dog did not move, and on bending over it he discovered that the exertion had been too much for it—the dog was dead.

If a shepherd can find such faithfulness in his dog, what should the Good Shepherd find in us when He bids us seek and help the lost? We need, as members of His Church, to get a fuller, clearer vision of the needs of the world, and of the hunger of the heart of God. We need a more constant realization of our responsibility towards those who are out of Christ, for only as we seek to win those who are lost and for whom He died, can we hope to gain the reward, a crown of glory.

We are reminded in 1 Cor. ix. 25 of the distinction between these crowns and those bestowed upon the

victors in the old Olympic games, in that, while the latter were fading and perishable, those that are to be conferred upon the saints by the hand of our Lord will be incorruptible. Just as our inheritance " fadeth not away " (1 Peter i. 4), so the crowns that are reserved for us can never tarnish nor decay, but shall abide in all their dazzling glory and wondrous beauty throughout the endless ages of eternity. Is it not strange that there should be any need for the warning given in the letter to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. iii. 11), "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown " ? Yet surely, even in these days such an admonition is by no means unnecessary.

There are many other rewards promised to the Lord's people that are worthy of much fuller consideration than can be given to them here, all of which are definitely connected with the return of Christ, and to be bestowed upon the members of His Church at His appearing. There is, for example, the assurance of His commendation in the day of His coming. We read in 1 Cor. iv. 5, " Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God " (or, as in R.V., " then shall each man have his praise from God "). How unspeakably sweet it will be, as we gather around Him in the day of His Return, for each one to receive from His gracious lips words of praise. Conscious as we are

now of our utter unworthiness, of constant failure, and of sin, it is nothing less than marvellous that He should find, even in His redeemed and glorified saints, anything that can merit any words of commendation. Surely such words will amply atone for anything we may have suffered for His sake during our earthly pilgrimage.

But not only will He address words of praise to each one, but He has Himself promised to confess us before the angels. Hear His words—"Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God" (Luke xii. 8 and 9). It is evident that that acknowledgment of His people is to be at His coming, for when we compare the passage before us with the one in Mark viii. (ver. 38) we learn that He is referring to the time when He "cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." And who can measure the felicity of hearing His lips openly acknowledge us as His own, amidst all the august environment of His appearing? And even if it be argued that this open confession of the members of His Church has reference to the scene that will be enacted at the close of the millennium, when the books are opened, and the names are disclosed written in the Lamb's book of life, still the fact remains that He *will* thus openly acknowledge us, and in this acknowledgment we shall find ample recompense for the service, so often

marred by self and sin, that we have sought to render here, by the confession of His name before the world. How strange it is that, with the promise of such a reward held out to those who declare themselves as His servants and followers, so many should be ashamed to speak of Him and for Him.

Again, the blessing of rest is set before us as another reward awaiting the faithful in the day when Christ is revealed. "It is a righteous thing with God," says St. Paul (2 Thess. i. 6) "to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (marg., "the angels of His power"). Rest from persecution, from care, from anxiety, from distress of every kind; rest of heart, of mind and of will; rest that shall be unbroken, unclouded and eternal—this surely is a sweet reward and one greatly to be desired, especially by those who are called upon to suffer in mind, body or estate.

Promises of reward are made, too, in each of the letters to the seven Churches mentioned in the opening chapters of Revelation, to those who overcome, but it must suffice to say in general terms that these point on to the time when those who have resisted evil, and have followed the Lamb, shall enter upon a life of satisfaction and victory, of joy and blessing, far beyond our powers of conception, in the presence of the Eternal King Himself.

CHAPTER V

The Church at the Marriage Supper

There are many similitudes used in the New Testament to illustrate the connection between Christ and His Church. We are told, for example, that the Church is the Body of Christ, and that He is the Head. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," we read, "hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22 and 23).

Such expressions indicate very clearly the marvellous unity that exists, not only between the members themselves, but also—and especially—between them and their Lord. Jesus illustrates this completeness of identity by His parable of the vine and its branches (John xv.). Without attempting to enter upon any detailed exposition of this parable we may point out the utter powerlessness of a branch apart from its parent stem. No life can exist, no beauty appear, no fruitfulness be exhibited unless the branch abide in the vine, but whilst it is in that vital union it can draw upon the vine for every need. And the members of

Christ's Church are in this happy and privileged position, that in Him every need is met, moment by moment.

It is, indeed, extremely important that we should keep in mind the closeness of the bond which exists between the glorified and coming Lord and His own people, if we are rightly to appreciate the certainty of the glorious future that lies before us.

But just now we are chiefly concerned with another relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church. He is represented as the heavenly Bridegroom, for Whose coming the Church, His Bride, is watching and waiting. Unspeakably precious is this title, and very wonderful the prospect it brings before us. Christ, at His Second Coming, will come as a Bridegroom for His Bride, and take her in to the marriage feast. Again and again is the thought of the marriage relation brought before us, and although the imagery has often been abused, yet there is a marvellously sweet truth in it. Let us seek briefly, and very reverently, to meditate upon it.

John the Baptist refers to the Lord as a Bridegroom when, in replying to those who had come to him to tell him that Christ was baptizing, and all men were coming to Him, he said, without any trace or suspicion of jealousy, "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom who standeth and heareth Him rejoiceth greatly because of the

Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John iii. 29). The Baptist had been a popular preacher, a great revivalist; and it was a searching test of his true character to learn that Another, and a greater One, was eclipsing him in the estimation of the people. He disclaimed any honour other than that of being the friend of the Bridegroom in Whom he rejoiced. But, in thus speaking of the Lord as the Bridegroom, he gave utterance to a truth of profound importance. It may be that he had in his mind the great prophetic Psalm (xlv.)—the Psalm of the King—which gives us such a vivid picture of the delight of the Lord in His chosen Bride. This Psalm obviously looks forward to the Advent in glory when the Church is to be brought into the royal palace to be presented to the Bridegroom.

The same thought of the closeness of the union between the Lord and His people is, of course, specially to be found in the Song of Solomon, and in such expressions as that contained in Isaiah lxii. 5, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee"; or Hosea ii. 19 and 20, "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness."

It is only as we turn to the New Testament that we get the thought of the Church as the Bride of Christ.

There the teaching is very clear and definite, however. We may refer, for example, to such a passage as that in Eph. v., where St. Paul, in the midst of injunctions as to the walk and warfare of the believer, breaks off from his immediate theme, compelled to the digression by the mention of the love that should exist in the married life. "Husbands, love your wives," he writes, and then immediately adds, "even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (vers. 25-27).

The love of Christ, it may be noted, is indicated by the threefold fact that *in the past* He gave Himself for the Church, *in the present* He is sanctifying and cleansing it, and *in the future* He will present it to Himself in flawless perfection, coming to claim His spotless and all-glorious Bride. Here we have the thought of the *purchase* of the Church, the *perfecting* of the Church, and the *presentation* of the Church—and all because of the great love of the heavenly Bridegroom. Christ, Who bought the Church with the price of His own precious blood, is even now preparing it for the day when He will present it to Himself—when all the true children of the Kingdom, baptized by one Spirit into one body, shall be glorified together with Him. For there is yet to be the marriage feast—the Marriage of the Lamb—for which the

Church is now being made ready ; and when the morning dawns upon which the Lord shall come to claim His Bride, nothing shall avail to hinder the perfect and eternal glorification of every true child of God.

Such a representation of our Lord would appear almost irreverent if it were not so clearly taught in the inspired Word. But as we meditate upon it we are reminded that the wondrous love of Christ in seeking His Bride was entirely disinterested. He sought us for ourselves alone, and not because of any righteousness or merit on our part. We could bring Him no dowry. On the contrary, we owe "ten thousand talents." Our lineage is not royal, but low and mean. We are, by nature, without goodness, or beauty, or worth ; without anything to recommend us, unloving and unlovable ; aliens and rebels. Yet He "loved the Church and gave Himself for it." She was a captive, and He set her free ; a criminal, and He suffered in her stead. He provides all that she needs, and is preparing the home where His Church may be for ever with Him, her glorified and reigning Lord. No earthly bridegroom, when he has found his bride, can ever add one feature to her beauty or accomplishments ; but Christ, when He takes *His* Bride, will remove from her all traces of earth, and add all His own grace, and the glories of heaven.

There is always the possibility that the love of a bridegroom on earth may cool in the course of the circling years, however affectionate he may seem at

first ; but Christ whispers the astonishing avowal, " I have loved thee with an everlasting love." His love is not only as high as the heavens above, and fathomless as the deepest sea, but as lasting as eternity.

The thought of this relationship between Christ and the Church is again introduced in the closing scenes of the book of Revelation, where John tells us he heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude saying, " Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him ; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white ; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb " (xix. 6-9). What a thrilling description of the day of which we speak, when all heaven itself shall be filled with the sound of rejoicing and of devout homage, the mingled song of an immense host, gathering to the marriage supper.

Here is the completion of the betrothal of Christ and His people, for when we first believed on Him He espoused each one of us to Himself, taking us to be His own, and giving Himself to us in all His glorious sufficiency. We cannot tell all that is meant by the marriage supper—eternity alone can reveal that—but it surely signifies that all who have loved and served Him here below shall then enter into " a bliss that shall

never end; a bliss which no fear approacheth or doubt becloudeth" (Spurgeon).

It is quite evident that embodied in the hope of the marriage supper we have the certainty of the *complete unification*, at last, of all the Lord's people—the perfect, though long-delayed fulfilment of His prayer "that they all may be one." Here the Church of Christ is rent by endless divisions. Trifles of organization are allowed to become as barbed wire fences that none can attempt to cross without injury. Minor details loom as a great and separating gulf between various denominations. But there can be none of these things when the whole Church comes as a Bride to her marriage supper. The very hope of this great event helps, even now, to bring unity nearer, leading the Lord's people to think more of essentials and of the coming glory, and less of the things that mar the perfect harmony of the Church. But when our hope is realized all sectarianism and denominationalism will be lost sight of in the surpassing wonder of that marvellous event.

The marriage supper speaks of the *perfect purification* of the Church, and of her final and entire separation from evil of every kind. In the present world the Church has to struggle against error, to contend with infidelity, and, by earnest testimony and holy watchfulness, to strive to root out sin. This is a life of warfare and of work, and oftentimes of failure and of sin; always of temptation from the world, the

flesh and the devil. Now, we are often bewildered, perplexed, disappointed. Too greatly the spirit of worldliness is allowed to creep in and the Church proves disloyal and unfaithful. But when the Bridegroom comes He is to present the Church to Himself "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

The stains that mar her beauty now
Shall shortly disappear;
Soon, in remembrance of His vow,
The Bridegroom will be here:
Then her divisions shall be healed,
Her tears shall all be dried;
And she shall stand at His right hand
A faultless, glorious Bride.

When, in endless wedlock, the Bridegroom and the Bride shall be united all the fitness of the Bride will be by free grant. "To her was granted" to be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white"—the righteousness of saints. This is the Church's wedding-dress—the imputed righteousness of her loving Lord. And, therefore, she sings as Isaiah taught God's people to sing in olden time, "My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness . . . as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa. lxi. 10).

From Jesus alone comes all our meetness for fellowship with Him. But, clothed in the right royal garments that He provides, the Church will enter into the closest and happiest communion with Him in His

glory, to the overflowing of their mutual delight and joy. What unspeakable rapture it will be for the Church to be thus taken into such intimate fellowship with Christ! Now we long, if we are really His, for a more perfect love for Him, a better and higher nature that we may love Him more. At the marriage supper we shall have what here we can only long for. We shall see our Lord in a form in which we shall know Him; and our very souls will be filled with delight in Him. "The love of this hour will be the perfection of love. The marriage feast will be the triumph of love—the exalted Saviour showing to the whole universe that He loves us to the utmost bounds that love can go, and we loving Him with a fervour, a gratitude, an adoration, a delight, that are new even in heaven." There will be no room for even the shadow of a fear in the glory of that hour, but there will be the felt and visible presence of Christ for ever and ever.

What more can be said except this, that, whilst in this life we may have to bury many of our dreams, the objects of our ambition, as well as many of our plans and pursuits, and whilst our fondest hopes are often doomed to disappointment, yet there is one that will never fail—the hope of the Bridegroom's coming. This is the prospect we need never relinquish. As our life-star it shall lead us on, even as the star that guided the wise men, and shall never disappear until it actually brings us to the vision of Christ.

CHAPTER VI

The Church Triumphant

It is absolutely impossible for any pen to describe, or even for any finite mind to conceive, the glories of the Church when once it has been caught up to be with the Lord.

We have already discussed the bestowal of rewards upon those whose works will stand the test of "fire," as they stand before the judgment seat of Christ; and it might be thought there would be some whose joy would be less perfect and complete than that of others, because of the necessary differences in the recompense received. Christ will then give to every man "according as his work shall be." When the nobleman returned from the far country and took account of the servants whom he had left behind, he rewarded each of the faithful ones, but in varying degrees, for he gave to one authority over ten cities, to another authority over five cities, and so on (Luke xix. 11-19). But this certainly does not mean that any single member of the Church will entertain any spirit of pride because he has received the greater reward, nor any sense of envy on account of his appointment to a position of less honour or dignity.

Nor does it imply that there will be any consciousness of loss, such as might dim the glory of the life in the immediate presence of the Lord. It would rather seem to indicate that some of the redeemed will be capable of greater joy, and blessing, and service, than others. To each true and faithful servant the invitation will be extended "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. xxv. 21); and we cannot for one moment entertain the thought that His joy will be in any sense defective. It is simply a question of capacity—a capacity that will have been, to a larger or smaller extent, developed by the employment of our talents here; by the opportunities of service of which we have availed ourselves; by the cultivation of the Christ-like spirit. The man who, in this life, has yielded himself unreservedly to the control of the Holy Spirit, living in the very atmosphere of fellowship with Christ, and seeking in every possible way the extension of the Kingdom of God, will thus have enlarged his capacity for the enjoyment of the yet more perfect communion of the life to come, and will doubtless be given some form of service in the Church triumphant that none other could undertake.

On the other hand, there will be many who, for various reasons—the lateness of their surrender to the call and claims of Christ, or the imperfection of their surrender—will not be capable of the same exquisite delight, or the supreme dignity of service. Yet they, too, shall be filled to the full with the joy

of their Lord. Being His by faith, having accepted His great salvation, and resting in the atoning merit of His precious blood, they will be brought safely home, and, to the very limit of their spiritual capacity, will know the bliss of the redeemed ; but their reward will not be equal to that awarded to the more faithful and diligent servant. In other words, there will evidently be degrees in the blessedness of the eternal world, and yet none will be conscious of any lack of joy, or any feeling of jealousy at the greater honour bestowed upon others.

We have spoken of "service" in the Church triumphant. But who can tell what that service will be ? Neither its character nor its scope is revealed in the pages of Holy Writ. Yet in the description of the life that is awaiting the Church of God, as given in the closing chapters of Revelation, we are not only told that we shall see the Face of our glorified Lord, the Lamb upon His throne, and have His Name in our foreheads, but also that "His servants shall serve Him" (Rev. xxii. 3). This must mean more than adoration. Whilst the courts of the Eternal City will undoubtedly be filled with the rapturous songs of the redeemed, and the praises of saints and angels will for ever ascend before the throne of the living God, yet we cannot doubt that, in some way or other, the life beyond will be one of activity that shall never tire, of work without weariness. One cannot imagine a man of St. Paul's boundless, eager

enthusiasm in the cause of Christ spending eternity in praise alone. His training in the Church militant was surely a preparation for service of some kind in the Church triumphant. And the same might be said of all the men whose zeal for their Lord dominated their whole life, leading them to ceaseless evangelistic enterprise, to unremitting toil in His vineyard, and often to peril and danger—even, in numberless cases, to a martyr's crown.

When the writer's son—a bright young fellow of 22—was lying waiting for the Home-call, his face glowing with the eager anticipation that he was "to see the King so soon," he remarked to his father, "I hope you will not think the money spent on my 'Varsity training has been wasted now I am going Home. I am sure the Lord has been training me in that way for some greater service than I could ever have given here." He had hoped to be a missionary amongst the high caste boys of India—but that was not to be, and his closing hours were radiant because he felt that the Lord had need of him for wider and fuller service in the unseen world. What form it was to take or how he was to be employed, he did not know; it was sufficient for him that his life on earth had been the preparation for work in greater fields than even India could offer. To him, and doubtless to countless others like him, the great charm of the City to which he was going lay, not in its streets of gold and gates of pearl; not in its beautiful crowns and palms of victory;

not in its harps and songs ; not in its dazzling glory, nor its angelic inhabitants ; not even in its freedom from care and sorrow, and the anxious, dread to-morrow ; but first and foremost in the unveiled Face and the eternal presence of the One he had learned to love, and then in the certainty of service unmingled with failure, untainted by mistakes or sin, and untrammelled by physical limitations.

Joy, joy, joy ! Yes, joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Praise, praise, praise ! Yes, praise unceasing and unfaltering. But work too, in some form or other—work that can only be done by those who have been freed from all infirmities of the flesh, and who are unhampered by the restraints inevitable to our poor humanity.

Although we cannot picture the character of our employment when we are clothed with our spiritual bodies, so that space will be annihilated for us, and our powers in all directions inconceivably amplified, yet we have some glimpses of the occupation of the Church triumphant in the parable to which reference has already been made—that of the nobleman who, when he had received the kingdom for which he sought, returned and gave the servants who had been faithful in his absence authority over cities. When Christ comes in manifested glory it will be to deliver His ancient people from the machinations of a great trinity of evil—the Beast, Antichrist, and Satan—see Rev. xiii. These three will have gathered together the kings of

the earth to make war upon the Jews—ostensibly because of their refusal to worship the image of the Beast which is to be set up in the new Temple at Jerusalem. At the very crisis of the war, when the utter annihilation of the Jewish nation will appear inevitable, Christ will come in all His glory. "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives" (Zech. xiv. 4)—the place from which He ascended in the days of long ago—and His enemies shall be utterly overwhelmed. When He thus comes, He will be attended by all the hosts of the redeemed. "Behold," says Enoch in his prophecy (Jude 14), "the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints," and they who accompany Him, as described in Rev. xvii. 14, are those who are "called and chosen and faithful."

We cannot now investigate the details of the great battle of Armageddon which will take place when Christ thus comes to the rescue of His tortured people. But it would appear that at His coming in glory He will be welcomed by the Jews as their Messiah, and, believing on Him with all their hearts, they will become a part of His Church. At that time, too, there will be the resurrection of all who have suffered martyrdom for His Name's sake during the great tribulation. Their rising from the dead at the very beginning of the Millennium will complete the first resurrection. "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the Beast,

neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years . . . This is the first resurrection" (Rev. xx. 4 and 5).

Now when the Lord thus begins His millennial reign what will the Church be doing? In verses following those just quoted we read, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." When Peter asked the Lord what reward would be given to him and his fellow-apostles because they had left all and followed Him, Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. xix. 28). The "regeneration" is, literally, the re-creation, the making new, and evidently refers to the renewal of the earth and the re-creation of the social order when Christ sets up His kingdom. It would seem that under the government of Christ the kingdom will be administered, so far as Israel is concerned, through the apostles, according to the ancient theocratic judge-ship, thus fulfilling the promise in Isa. i. 26, "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning." The Old Testament judges were men raised up of God to represent Him in the nation. They were, as

Dr. Scofield remarks, patriots and religious reformers, because national security and prosperity were inseparably connected with loyalty and obedience to Jehovah.

But whilst the apostles are thus singled out for special governmental authority under the coming kingship of Christ, the whole Church is to reign with Him. The promise of reigning with Christ is not confined to the martyrs mentioned in Rev. xx. 4 quoted above, though they are to share in that great dignity. All who have part in the first resurrection —the whole Church—will be enthroned with Jesus Christ. The "new song" of those gathered round the Lamb as seen in Rev. v. was "Thou art worthy . . . for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (verses 9 and 10).

One of the "faithful sayings" of the Epistles to Timothy embodies the same promise, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 12); and, in writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul, in rebuking them for going to law before the unjust when quarrels arose, asks them the startling question, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" and again, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. vi. 2 and 3). Evidently then the Church, however despised she may be to-day, and whatever

may be said of the failings of those who constitute it, has a glorious future before it. It is to be the administrative part of the kingdom and to reign with Christ for the whole period of the millennial rule. It is an amazing thought; a prospect that is almost too glorious for human contemplation, that *all* His servants will reign with Him when He comes in His majesty. His dominion will extend over every continent and clime. Apparently, Jerusalem is to be the centre of His government, for we read in Isa. xxiv. 23, "The Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously." In Micah iv. 7, we read, "The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." And the same idea is presented in many other passages, leading to the conviction that the city in which our Lord was rejected in the days of old, and where He was betrayed and crucified, will be the seat of His throne in the golden age that is yet to dawn.

But in any case His Kingdom will be world-wide. Nothing could be clearer than the prophecies which foretell its universality. Thus Zechariah declares (ix. 10) "His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." Though "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. ii. 3), yet "the Lord shall be King over all the earth" (Zech. xiv. 9). To Him shall all kings be subject, for He is King of

kings and Lord of lords; and His rule will extend not merely over the surface of the habitable globe, but throughout the whole universe. Satan is now the Prince of the power of the air, but when the Lord comes he is to be overthrown and cast into the bottomless pit, and Christ shall exercise His sway where hitherto Satanic powers have been in possession. Even hell itself, and the uttermost parts of God's creation, shall all acknowledge His sovereignty.

And in all this the Church is to share. Ring the note again, and yet again. Let the glad heart of man repeat it o'er and o'er, "We shall reign with Him; We shall reign with Him," and, in our glorified bodies, find it our highest joy to serve Him. The day of His coronation as Universal Sovereign will be the day of our coronation too.

We may well pursue this line of thought a little further, and ask what kind of world this will be under the beneficent rule of the Almighty King. If the Church is indeed to reign with Him, it is a subject of absorbing interest to know the character of His government.

First of all it will be a *peaceful* reign. When Christ comes to occupy the throne of universal empire, and all nations of the earth are under His sovereignty, then, and not until then, shall we know the real meaning of the word peace. The ancient prophecy tells us that "Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"

(Micah iv. 3) ; but this will only find its fulfilment when Christ comes. For years past the world has been "learning war." Implements of destruction, great and terrible, have been multiplied. All kinds of inventions for the slaughter of mankind have been perfected—torpedoes, mines, machine-guns, bombs, poison-gas and innumerable other contrivances, having as their avowed aim the crippling or killing of our fellows. The science of warfare has engaged the minds and stimulated the ingenuity of men in all lands. Even as this chapter is being written, an article appears in the daily press telling of the invention of gas bombs capable of wiping out the entire population of London in a very short space of time. But at Christ's coming, and the establishment of His Kingdom, all this will be ended. Then swords shall be converted into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks—instruments of death into implements of useful toil—and we may then look for a true and lasting peace.

It is sometimes argued that the formation of the League of Nations will eventually render war impossible. The League is, undoubtedly, a magnificent ideal, and is already doing a fine pacific work. But it will prove insufficient to avert at least one great war in days to come. Whilst the federation of nations in such a League is clearly predicted in Holy Writ, there is no indication there that such an international confederacy will ensure peace. On the contrary,

just before the manifestation of Christ the world will be engaged in a conflict far more titanic than anything hitherto experienced, and it is only when He comes and we have a real "League of Nations" under One Supreme Ruler that the world will fully know the blessings of peace.

Not only will there be international peace, but in the internal affairs of the countries of the world there will be a cessation of strife. Class will no longer fight against class, labour against capital, employees against employers; but all will work together in perfect harmony to promote the best and highest interests of all, without any jealousies or suspicions. And, as it would appear, there will even be peace in the animal world, for Isa. xi. 6-9 points to a time when the wild beasts of to-day will lose their ferocity. Why should we treat this prediction as an allegory? The animals were not wild when they were brought to Adam to see what he would call them. It was only when sin entered that they became cruel and treacherous. And when sin is again crushed, and the world is under the beneficent sway of the King of Righteousness they will surely return to their original state.

Further, the world under the rule of Christ, will be a *purified* world. One of the first acts of Christ when He comes with His Church will be to bind Satan, for we read in Rev. xx. 1-3, immediately after the account of the great war that ends in the destruction

of the Beast and the kings of the earth and the false prophet, that an angel is sent with a great chain to lay hold upon "that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan" and to bind him for a thousand years. He will "cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him" that he may not deceive the nations any more till the thousand years shall be fulfilled. A "seal" was put upon the sepulchre of Christ, but it could not prevent His resurrection, nor keep Him in the tomb; but when a seal is put upon the Devil's abode, not all the powers of hell will be able to break it. And when Satan is thus bound, and can no longer bring temptation to the dwellers upon earth, judgment and justice will have their perfect work. What a magnificent picture of the reign of Christ and His Church is given us in Psalm lxxii. In His days the righteous are to flourish and there is to be abundance of peace. All wrongs will be righted; the poor and needy are to be saved from oppression, deceit, and violence; and all men shall be blessed in Him. No wonder that with such a vision filling his inmost soul the Psalmist breaks out into a perfect cataract of praise: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory: Amen, and Amen" (vers. 18 and 19).

The government of Christ will be strong enough to crush all opposing forces and all the social evils

that mar our national life and the life of the world to-day. These things—such as intemperance, immorality, gambling, and many others—will not be tolerated for a moment when the King comes, and throughout the length and breadth of the world there will be nought but goodness and truth.

To-day, in every department of life, national and international, the world is passing through a time of tremendous difficulty and grave danger. A deep undertone of real anxiety is betrayed in the speeches of the most eminent statesmen throughout the world. It is as though we had climbed above the darkness, cloud, and horrible confusion of war only to find ourselves surrounded by a dense shadow and a deepening gloom that makes our hearts afraid. Or, as if we traversed the surface of a boundless ocean, the rippling sunlit waters of which are resting after a terrific storm, and yet upon the far horizon we see the threatening clouds, and catch from time to time ominous rumblings as of another approaching tempest. All through the world, in every sphere of national life—political, social, commercial, economical—we find indications of impending danger. There is a spirit of restless discontent, a surging wave of dissatisfaction that, at times, fills our very souls with oppressive forebodings. Labour troubles; mutual suspicions and jealousies that are no longer concealed; the growing power of elements that threaten the stability of our very existence, and that, if once they break loose, will overturn all the

foundations of national prosperity—these things are sources of justifiable anxiety. And amidst it all we are conscious of a growing prevalence of sin that threatens to undermine the very fabric of our national life; and the hearts of all true men and women are saddened beyond expression by the laxity of public morals.

Is all this but a gloomy picture drawn by a disappointed and misanthropic pessimist? God forbid! It is ours, thank God, to sing of a glory that is yet to dawn, of a golden age that is yet to be, of a better time that is coming by-and-by. Oh! the joy of it all, that we can look forward to a time when all these dark clouds shall be scattered, and when the Lord Himself shall establish His Kingdom and manifest His glory. Let us not forget that, as believers, we have a glorious hope, firm and immoveable, based on the sure foundation of the written Word. God is in the midst of us; we have not lost Him, however dark the outlook may be. Christ is coming to reign, and we shall reign with Him in a world purified by His presence from all that is evil.

Yet once more—the world will be *perfected*, as well as peaceful and purified, when the Lord comes with His glorified Church to set up His Kingdom and reign. We may well thank God for the sure and certain hope of the restoration of Edenic conditions. That will be the time spoken of by St. Peter—"the times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord"—that is,

when through the appearance of the Messiah in His Kingdom there shall be blessed rest and refreshment for the people of God. He speaks, too, of " the times of restitution of all things "—the restoration of the theocracy under David's Son (Acts iii. 19-21). And, when the Lord is personally and visibly present, and reigning in the midst of His people, the very desert shall become a garden, and the wilderness and solitary place shall be made glad with a great gladness.

For this all creation waits with " earnest expectation." " For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God " (Rom. viii. 19). The word used here suggests the figure of a man whose head is raised, looking out with intense expectation and longing. And the object of such eager anticipation is the " manifestation (literally, the unveiling) of the sons of God " in their glorified condition, and in all their unclouded beauty—for we are to be " like Him."

No longer will be heard the minor key of creation's moan, nor earth's sad groaning. The world will then " lay aside her soiled, week-day garb and put on her Sabbath dress ; and with her singing robes about her take up again the anthem which was heard when the sons of God shouted for joy."

All signs of the times point to Christ's near approach ; and full soon, as we believe, we shall see Him face to face at Whose coming the whole Church will rejoice. Deliverance is at hand ; the restitution of all that the

earth has lost by sin will soon be vouchsafed ; victory over all the forces of evil will not be long delayed. Let us lift up our heads, for our " redemption draweth nigh."

Oh the joy to see Thee reigning,
Thee, my own beloved Lord !
Every tongue Thy Name confessing,
Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
Brought to Thee with glad accord !
Thee, my Master and my Friend,
Vindicated and enthroned !
Unto earth's remotest end
Glorified, adored and owned !

For the Church the future is therefore full of glorious hope. The " rainbow " is still " round about the throne." God is in His heaven, working out His own gracious purposes, and we rejoice in the prospect of the speedy return of Jesus Christ. We shall soon see the Face of the coming King, and shall be " caught up " to be " for ever with the Lord."

CHAPTER VII

A Call to the Church

There are not a few, even in our own days, who are inclined to regard the study of prophecy as a useless, unprofitable waste of time, if nothing worse, because, as it seems to them, it can lead to nothing of a practical character, but only to vague and idle speculations. Others there are who decry the time and thought spent upon it, on the ground that the diversity of opinions held by those who do devote themselves to its pursuit proves the impossibility of arriving at any definite conclusion, and that therefore matters upon which some certainty may be reached ought to take precedence.

In answer to these it may be asserted, with all confidence, that there is no doctrine within the scope of Divine revelation that touches man more closely in all the details of daily life, than the belief that at any moment the Saviour may return and call to Himself those who are His followers. They who hold this tenet, and look forward to the Return of Christ as a literal and actual fact, have their dreams of coming glory, but they are not merely dreamers and visionaries. They may be esteemed by their fellows

as cranks and faddists, but it will always be found that they who sincerely and eagerly await the Second Advent of our Lord are fully as faithful and zealous in the discharge of their daily tasks as any who neglect this truth; and are animated by a hope that fills their lives with a joy and peace to which others are often strangers. We do not search the Scriptures in reference to this theme—nor meet to discuss it—for the mere gratification of an idle curiosity, but because of its transcendent importance, and its intensely practical bearing upon our daily life.

In bringing to a conclusion, therefore, this series of studies as to how the Church of Christ will be affected by His Second Coming, it seems wise to emphasize the fact that even the anticipation of that great event constitutes a clamant, insistent call to the Church which we cannot afford to ignore. It is, for example, a call to greater loyalty to our Lord and to the Word of God. In these days, when fundamental truths are being so constantly and vigorously attacked, it is particularly important to re-echo this call. Immediately following upon his re-affirmation of the great hope of the Church—his declaration that we are waiting for the Saviour from heaven, Who, at His coming, shall fashion anew these bodies of our humiliation (Phil. iii. 20 and 21 R.V.), the Apostle proceeds, "Therefore, my brethren . . . stand fast in the Lord" (iv. 1).

How terribly the Church seems to be losing her

grip of the masses of the people in these days! How oppressive is the sense of ineffectiveness, notwithstanding the widespread work of the Church and its wonderful organization! We view with growing alarm the depleted attendances at our places of worship and the increasing disregard for sacred things. We see, with the deepest concern, the prevailing tendency to cast off all the restraints of former days, to break loose from the old moorings, and to drift from the fundamental principles of the Gospel. On all hands there is a grievous departure from the primitive simplicity of the truth—in short, a great current seems to be carrying the Church rapidly onwards towards the rocks of worldliness and rationalism.

We live in times when nothing seems too sacred for the despoiling touch of so-called Modernists and Higher Critics. The very Deity of our Lord, His Virgin birth, the fulness and sufficiency of His atonement, are all attacked, whilst the miraculous element is eliminated from all parts of the Bible, and the Divine authority and authenticity of the Word are constantly called in question.

But if, in any one part, Scripture can be demonstrated to be unreliable, then it is useless as a foundation. A flower, perfect and beautiful in its entirety, ceases to be so when its petals are plucked off. A chain is useless if even one link be proved defective. Now the hope of the Lord's Return is entirely based upon the Word of God, and if any one part of that

Book is not to be regarded as trustworthy then we are building upon a foundation that is worthless. The " blessed hope " runs throughout the Bible, but if the Divine inspiration of that sacred book be doubtful in any single instance, then that hope may be illusory. Thank God, we have no such fear. This is not the opportunity for a discussion upon the whole question of the Authorship of the Word, but our declared belief that Christ is coming for His Church is, in itself, a demand that we should re-affirm our whole-hearted acceptance of the Word in its entirety.

Coupled with the necessity for a firm, unwavering adhesion to the Word of God is the call to a deeper, truer loyalty to our Lord Himself. We have spoken of His Return as the coming of a Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church. If that statement of relationship be justifiable there should be little need to incite the members of that Church to the greater manifestation of their loyalty to Him. Yet, how utterly unworthy we are of the high estate to which we are called. How often we fail to do His will, to bear His likeness, to witness to His love and power, to testify to His saving and upholding grace. How frequently do we forget Him, or allow the things of the world to supplant Him in our affections. Is He really coming again—coming for His Church, and coming soon? Is it possible that even before these pages appear in print we may be caught up to meet Him? Surely, surely

if we really believed that, we should seek to be so loyal to Him in His absence that we may not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

The imminence of the Lord's Return is also a call to increased activity in His service. The time is short. All the movements of the age, national and international, point to the fact that the coming of the Lord is at hand. Opportunities for seeking to win others for Christ are, therefore, rapidly slipping from us. The need for evangelistic effort is tremendous, for the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil are leading hosts astray. We profess to believe that when the Lord comes they who are His will be caught up to glory unspeakable, whilst all others will be left behind to face the horrors of the Great Tribulation, or, if not then converted, the inconceivable terrors and anguish of the lost. We are His witnesses—but we too often prove traitors to our Lord. We have the Bread of Life in our possession, yet evince no sympathy with the starving multitudes. In our hands is the Water of Life, and we never give a draught to those around us who are dying of thirst. The bema is at hand—the judgment seat of Christ, before which we must all stand; the tribunal where Christ will distribute His rewards to all who have been engaged in His service. Yet we think so little of these things that we seldom seek so to present the Saviour to others that they may be led to His feet. It is marvellous in the extreme how little real sympathy is manifested by the

great majority of His followers towards the hosts of unsaved ones around us.

Years ago, the writer saw all traffic held up in one of the busiest streets in Bristol by the gathering of a great crowd of people, all watching with the utmost intentness and sympathy the efforts of a few in the centre of the ring who were seeking to help, and to secure from danger, a poor pigeon that had broken one of its wings. Many a time as the scene comes to mind the question presents itself, "Have we, as members of the Church of Christ, less sympathy for the men and women and children around us, the wings of whose spiritual nature have been broken by sin?" How great, how urgent is the need to-day for the loving, tender ministries of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and, in view of the shortness of the time before the Lord's return, how active should be the members of His Church.

The remembrance that His coming is near should lead us to the more earnest cultivation of a spirit of holiness, that will manifest itself in our daily life. What shall we be doing when the Lord comes? Where will He find us? Would we wish Him to come whilst we are engaged in such worldly pleasures and recreations as are, at least, questionable in their character, or in pursuits that we would fain hide from His all-searching sight? If we, as members of His Church, were really waiting for His appearing, should we not be more watchful, more diligent, more prayerful?

Would there not be in all of us a more constant display of a Christ-like character in all our social relationships ? Ought we not to seek to bear more abundantly the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control ? The more the Church realizes the certainty and the nearness of the Lord's Return the more will she seek to be ready for Him whenever He may come.

May we not hear, too, the call to a confident and joyous expectancy ? On all hands we see the gathering clouds. Men's hearts are failing them for fear, and the future is full of a great uncertainty as to what may happen in the political world. Truly, the days are darkening, the night is fast approaching. But for the Christian the future is all radiant with unutterable glory. He sees the time rapidly approaching when anxiety, sorrow and pain shall be no more ; when tears shall all be wiped away ; when in the immediate and unveiled presence of the King he shall enter upon a life of endless joy. All that embitters our existence in this world—all the heart-breaks, all the losses and separations, all the disappointments, and griefs ; pain, and sorrow, and sickness, and death will be known no more when the Lord comes for His Church. Lift up your heads—the King is coming, and " in His presence there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

And, lastly, the near approach of our Lord ought to act as an incentive to a closer unity. When He

comes there will be no longer any divisions in His Church. The misunderstandings that too often mar Christian fellowship to-day will all disappear then. Why should we not try to remove them now? If we are all to join in one great Hallelujah Chorus up yonder, might we not well be trying now to learn its harmonies? As we gather together around His throne we shall be one unbroken family—is it not possible to cultivate the unity of a family in the Church militant? Dr. Meyer pointed out in a recent address that the divisions in the Church to-day are telling very badly upon the great life of our country, for the drink traffic, the insensate love of pleasure and gross impurity are certainly on the increase, and this hydra-headed evil would have no power if only the Church of God stood together in one mighty protest. What we really need is a fuller realization of our essential unity in spiritual experience and in hope. "We are passing," added Dr. Meyer, "from one great era of the Church into another. We call it the Second Advent. It is to be the manifestation of the Son of God. There is soon to be an outbreak of the mighty power of Jesus through the Holy Ghost on His Church and people. In the unity of expectation we are one."

The subject that has been occupying our attention provides a rallying point. Whatever may be our differences in interpretation: whatever our school of thought—whether futurist or historicist—we yet hold the one great hope. Christ alone is the object

of our expectation, and as we wait and work for Him in the happy consciousness that He is the unseen Watcher now, but will soon be the revealed Rewarder, the Almighty Emancipator from the power of sin and death, we may well learn to disregard the lesser matters that tend to divide us, and to pray, and work, for the fulfilment of our Lord's own prayer for unity. This will not entail the slightest forfeiture of principle, nor the abandonment of any truth. It will only mean that each member of His Church will seek to magnify the points upon which all are agreed, and to leave those upon which we differ until the day when the fuller and clearer light of our Lord's own Presence shall dispel the mists of earth.

So only shall we, with a longing expectation that is inspired by the true spirit of unity, be able to say with one heart and one voice

"EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS."

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